CLAIMS

What is claimed is:

1. A system for providing an online multi-merchant gift registry service over a distributed network, comprising of:

   a plurality of Service Provider (SP) sites connected to the distributed network, each SP site running at least one service application to provide an online service to users over the distributed network;

   a plurality of user computers connected to the distributed network, each user computer running at least one client application for accessing online service of the SP sites;

   a Gift Registry site connected to the plurality of SP sites, the gift registry site running at least one gift registry service, the gift registry site including a user database and a SP database containing authentication information of users and Service Providers that have registered to use the gift registry service, the registered users accessing the SP sites from the users computers over the distributed network;

   a database which stores user-specific customization data, the customization data specifying preferences of the registered users with respect to the online services of the SP sites, the customization data provided to the SP sites by the online brokering service to enable the SP sites to customize the online services to the preferences of individual registered users; and

   a database which stores Service Provider information, the Service Provider information specifying communication information necessary for establishing secure connections between the SP and the Gift Registry site; and

   a database which stores all registered events, the said registered event database maintains the associated gift items and distribution lists that are related to the event; and

   a database which stores "Wish" list items; and

   a database which stores user reminders; and

   a database which stores SP notifications; the SP notifications are triggered by registered events that cause a reaction to occur at the SP site to perform some action which is SP-specific.

   an authentication protocol for allowing the gift registry service to authenticate users and Service Providers and communication links with the Service Providers systems, the authentication protocol implemented by software components of the SP site and the Gift Registry site.

   Whereby a scaleable system is defined that supports multiple online merchants of any size and from any location in the world.

2. A system as in claim 1, whereby the SP site can register a "Wish" list item or a gift purchase on the user's behalf.

3. A system as in claim 1, whereby a gift purchaser can purchase a gift for a registrant.

4. A system as in claim 3, whereby a search mechanism provides for accessing a gift registrant's "Wish" list.

5. A system as in claim 3, whereby the Gift Registry site can refer a gift purchaser to a SP site with gift information that will pre-populate the shopper's basket and present the checkout page for a speedy purchase, the said SP site may be either the registrant's preferred reseller or an alternate reseller chosen by the user.

6. A system as in claim 3, whereby gift recommendations may be provided based on individuals past buying habits and desires.

7. A system as in claim 1, whereby the user will receive an automatic reminder message upon the triggering of a pre-registered event.

8. A system as in claim 1, whereby the SP system will be notified automatically upon the triggering of a pre-registered event.

9. A system as in claim 1, whereby the SP system can register a "Sale" event, the "Sale" event may trigger automatic notifications to registrants who have registered an interest in that item.

10. A system as in claim 1, whereby users may register major events of multiple types and be provided event services, the event services consist of the registration of event-specific gift desires, distribution lists, discussion groups, and other related resources.

11. A system as in claim 10, whereby users may select from multiple styles of stationary for mailings.

12. A system as in claim 10, whereby users may reserve halls and meeting rooms for the registered event.

13. A system as in claim 10, whereby users may contract other event related businesses such as caterers, photographers, videographers, consultants, florists, clowns, comedians, musicians, djs, or other entertainers.

14. A system as in claim 10, whereby users may send out pre-canned templates with customized information as email notices to all users identified in distribution lists.

15. A system as in claim 1, whereby Service Providers may obtain marketing information.

16. A method whereby a plurality of participating Service Providers may register user "Wish" list items with the Gift Registry service on the user's behalf, comprising the steps of:

    Tagging items of interest on the user's request;

    Associating the items of interest with the shopper and their appropriate Gift Registry ID in a Service Provider's local "Wish" list database;

    Establishing secure communication link with the Gift Registry site upon the shopper's request of the transfer of items of interest;

    Transferring the items of interest via a Gift Registration Agent to a Gift Registrar of the Gift Registry site;

    Receiving an acknowledgement of receipt from the Gift Registrar, the Gift Registration Agent will delete the items of interest from the local "Wish" list database;

    Updating the centralized "Wish" list database by the Gift Registrar;

    Whereby providing an efficient process of registering multiple "Wish" list items seamlessly while browsing multiple Service Provider sites.

17. The method of claim 16, wherein the user tags the item of interest at the SP site to be later registered by the SP on the user's behalf.

18. The method of claim 17, wherein tagging an item of interest involves clicking on either a textual link or graphical button.

19. A method whereby potential gift purchasers may select a gift for a registrant and purchase the item with a participating Service Provider electronically, comprising the steps of:

Locating desired gift registrant either with the appropriate Gift Registry ID or by providing associated characteristics information such as city and state;

Selecting desired item or items to purchase from the gift registrant's "Wish" list;

Selecting either the preferred or alternate reseller;

Transferring gift item information via the Gift Registrar to the Gift Registration Agent of the SP site;

Receiving an acknowledgement of receipt from the Gift Registration Agent, the Gift Registrar will re-direct the user to the SPs pre-populated checkout page;

Providing payment information to SP site;

Confirming the order;

Receiving an Order Confirmation, the order confirmation being shown via online display immediately and later email notification;

Whereby a gift purchaser can make a purchase in a timely manner from the convenience of their home or office and the gift registrant's privacy is maintained.

20. The method of claim 19, wherein an alternate reseller is selected from a list of resellers that have registered the item of interest.

21. The method of claim 19, wherein the gift registrant's shipping information is hidden from view for privacy reasons on the reseller's checkout page.

22. A method whereby a plurality of participating Service Providers may register gift purchases that were referred by the Gift Registry system, comprising the steps of:

Establishing secure communication link with the Gift Registry site upon some predetermined time or frequency interval or number of purchases that were referred by the Gift Registry service;

Transferring gift purchase information via the Gift Registration Agent to the Gift Registrar of the Gift Registry site;

Receiving an acknowledgement of receipt from the Gift Registrar, the Gift Registration Agent will delete the gift purchase information from the gift purchase database;

Updating the occasion database and the centralized "Wish" list database by the Gift Registrar;

Whereby providing an efficient process of registering gift purchases and allowing the gift registry site to obtain marketing information such as referral statistics, which can also be used for billing purposes;

23. A method whereby Service Providers can register "sale" events, which will automatically notify users that have an interest in the item being advertised "on sale", comprising the steps of.

Establishing secure communication link with the Gift Registry site;

Transferring "Sale" information via the Gift Registration Agent to the Gift Registrar of the Gift Registry site;

Receiving an acknowledgement of receipt from the Gift Registrar, the Gift Registration Agent will stop trying to send the "Sale" event;

Whereby the buyer/seller process can be streamlined and thus provide an efficient use of resources.

24. An apparatus comprising.

A Gift Registry server operatively connected to a computer network, the server having a processor and a computer readable memory, the memory storing gift registry implementation software, including database management software, customer access software, and artificial intelligence software;

at lease one data structure including a list of gift registrants along with corresponding ID and profile information, and including a list of participating merchants with their corresponding communication information, the list of participating merchants being a subset of the sites available to users of the computer network, the at least one data structure further including the registration of occasions, "Wish" lists, reminders, and notifications;

a first data entry system through which information about registrants are entered into the computer system, the first information for each registrant including at least a first name, last name, and e-mail address, which the registrant has been assigned a unique identifier;

A second data entry system capable of receiving second information , the second information including a list of potential gifts or "Wish" list items which the registrant has identified and a unique identifier associated with the preferred reseller of the desire gifts;

A database storage system that stores and retrieves the first and second information about the registrant and the unique identifier associated with the preferred reseller of the desired gifts; and

A third data entry system through which information about Service Providers/Merchants are entered into the computer system, the third information for each service provider including at least a contact name and e-mail address;

A fourth data entry system capable of receiving fourth information, the fourth information including marketing reports which can be used to tailor individual services or products;

The database storage system, which also includes "occasions" in addition to the "Wish" list items

whereby the gift registry service facilitates seamless connection between gift registrants and purchasers and registered merchants for the purchasing of items and the registering of user "Wish" list items and gift purchases;

25. The gift registry as in claim 24 wherein the first, second, third, and fourth data entry system comprises a client application running on a user computer;

26. The gift registry as in claim 24 further comprising updating means for updating the database storage system as a prospective purchaser buys a gift from the list of potential gifts for a particular registrant and the participating Service Provider registers the gift purchase on the registrant's behalf.

27. The gift registry as in claim 24 further comprising a database storage system which resides on one or more computers at one or more sites that work in tandem.